

## **Week of October 26th – Matthew 22.34-46**

- Read each daily Devotional Reading using the SOAP method and Daily Devotional to help you reflect.
- Read the article below prior to group
- Think through the small group and accountability questions after the article

### ***Devotional Readings***

Sunday	Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Monday	Psalm 90
Tuesday	1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Wednesday	Matthew 22:34-46
Thursday	1 John 3
Friday	Revelation 5:6-14
Saturday	James 2

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### ***Article: The Great Commandment, and David's Master - Matthew 22.34-46***

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*by N.T. Wright from Matthew for everyone, Part 2( England: London : SPCK, 2002.), 92-96.*

I watched on television a tennis match between two of the game's finest players. Both had been playing well, but towards the end one of them seemed to rise to new heights. The match ended with two stunning games, when the winner not only did everything right but superlatively. First his opponent served, and each serve was met with a return that won the point. Then, when it was his turn to serve, each one was a clean ace. Game, set and match.

That's how the end of Matthew 22 is meant to strike us. The answer the opponents couldn't question was followed by the question they couldn't answer. Which is the greatest commandment, they asked? Jesus' answer was so traditional that nobody could challenge him on it, and so deeply searching that everyone else would be challenged by it. Then it was Jesus' turn: is the Messiah David's son or David's Master — or perhaps both? They'd never asked that question before, and they certainly didn't know the answer, even though it was standing in front of them in flesh and blood.

The next occasions when Jesus will meet his opponents will be in the garden when they arrest him, in the Council when they accuse him, and on the cross when they mock him. But each time they will know, he will know, and we as Matthew's readers will know, that he knows the answers to these questions and they do not. He also knows, and Matthew wants us to know as well, that his arrest, trial and crucifixion are precisely the way in which Jesus is fulfilling the two great commandments, and the way in which he is being enthroned both as David's son, the true king of Israel, and David's master, David's Lord. This is how, as the son of God in a still fuller sense, he has come to rescue his people. Unless we are prepared to see these questions in this light we will remain shallow in our understanding of them.

Let's deal with the surface level, though, because that matters greatly as well. Many Jewish teachers posed the question as to which was the greatest out of all the 613 commandments in the law of Moses. Many would have agreed substantially with the answer that Jesus gave. Equally important, though, these commandments were not simply among the things the Jews were supposed to do. They formed part of the prayer that every devout Jew prayed every day, in a tradition that continues unbroken to the present time.

But did people actually keep these commandments? Jesus has already spoken, in chapter 15, of the need for the heart to be renewed so that people will produce words and deeds which are appropriate, rather than making them impure. His challenge in the Sermon on the Mount was that the heart should be renewed, not just that the outward actions should conform with the proper standard.

But how could this be done? Even those of us who have spent our whole lives trying to follow Jesus and live by his grace and love know that the heart doesn't seem to get renewed all in one go. Many, many bits of darkness and impurity still lurk in its depths, and sometimes take a lot of work, prayer and counsel to dig out and replace with the love which we all agree should really be there.

Once more, what Jesus says here about loving God, and loving one another, only makes sense when we set it within Matthew's larger gospel picture, of Jesus dying for the sins of the world, and rising again with the message of new life. That's when these commandments begin to come into their own: when they are seen not as orders to be obeyed in our own strength, but as invitations and promises to a new way of life in which, bit by bit, hatred and pride can be left behind and love can become a reality.

Something similar is going on with Jesus' remarkable explanation about who the Messiah really is. Matthew is quite clear, of course, that Jesus is indeed the son of David (1.1; 20.30; etc.). The point is that simply calling him that doesn't tell the whole story. By itself, 'son of David' could mean, and for many Jews of the time did mean, the coming king who would win military victories over Israel's enemies. Such a figure would hardly encourage people to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves,

especially when we realize, as the Sermon on the Mount insists, that when we say the word 'God' we mean the creator and lover of the whole world, not just of one segment within it.

But if this God himself were to become human, as Matthew has insisted is the case (1.23), then we would be faced with a very different situation. If David's son is also David's master, then the war-like Davidic Messiah of popular Jewish imagination will be, after all, one who will bring the saving, healing rule of this creator God to the whole world. And the 'enemies' that he will put 'under his feet as Psalm 110 insists, will not be the nationalist enemies of an ethnic 'people of God but the ultimate enemies of the whole human race, and indeed of the whole world; in other words, sin itself and death, which it brings.

It is because Jesus sees that sin and death are still at work, in the Israel which prides itself on its special status, that he opposes so vehemently any attempt to prop up that national standing. That is why he will now launch into a full-scale denunciation of the attempts that were being made to do just that. But it is because Jesus knows that sin and death can only be defeated by David's master going to meet them in single, unarmed combat that he continues his work, as Matthew will tell us, all the way to the cross itself.

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**About the author:** N.T. Wright is Bishop of Durham (Church of England) and was formerly Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey and dean of Lichfield Cathedral. A graduate of Oxford University, he previously taught at Cambridge, McGill, and Oxford Universities. Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), and *The Resurrection and the Son of God* (2003) are the first three volumes of his projected six-volume series entitled *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (SPCK/ Fortress Press). Among his many other published works are *The Original Jesus* (1996), *What Saint Paul Really Said* (1997), and *The Climax of the Covenant* (1992). He is the author of the *For Everyone* commentary series.

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### **Small Group Questions**

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#### **Accountability**

Nurturing Relationships - How are you developing nurturing relationships? Are you showing up? How are you making community and teamwork important to your life? How's your commitment to small group and worship going? Are you reaching your group and individual goals in this area?

#### **Open / Scripture**

1. How you think most people describe the behavior of Christians?
2. What does that described behavior tell them about what Christianity is all about?

#### **Observation**

1. What are the two commandments that Jesus gives as being the greatest?
2. In what way is the second like the first?
3. How do these two commandments uphold all of the rest of the commandments? Examples?
4. What is Jesus trying to say to the Pharisees in his question about David's statement in Psalm 110?

#### **Apply**

1. What would it mean to love God with you mind? Soul? Strength?
2. What would it mean to love your adjacent neighbors, where you live, as you love yourself?
3. List out some examples of each of these ways of loving that Jesus commands us to do, and put them into practice this week.